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The Diamond Queen.

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE.

One of The Star's Week-End Fiction Series.
Each story complete in three installments.

"MEET Sylvia, Quarantine, midnight. Strange death Rawaraska. Retain you in interest at ship company. Thompson, Furs." Kennedy had torn open the envelope of a wireless message that had come from somewhere out in the Atlantic and had just been delivered to him at dinner one evening. He read it quickly and tossed it over to me.

"Rawaraska," I repeated. "Do you suppose that means the clever little Russian dancer who was in the 'Revue' last year?"

"There could hardly be two of that unusual name who would be referred to so familiarly," returned Craig. "Curious that we've had nothing in the wireless news about it."

"Perhaps it has been delayed," I suggested. "Let me ring up the Star. They may have something now."

A few minutes later I rejoined Craig at the table. A report had just been received that Rawaraska had been discovered late the night before unconscious in her room on the Sylvania. The ship's surgeon had been summoned, but before he was able to do anything for her she died. That was all the report said. It was meager, but it served to excite our interest.

Renee Rawaraska, I knew, was a popular little Russian dancer abroad who had come to America the season previous and had made a big hit on Broadway. Beautiful, strange, fiery, she incarnated the mysterious Slav. I knew her to be one of those Russian dancers before whose performance Parisian audiences had gone wild with admiration, one who had carried her art beyond anything known in other countries, fascinating, subtle.

Hastily over the telephone Kennedy made arrangements to go down to Quarantine on a revenue tug that was leaving to meet the Sylvania. It was a weird trip through the choppy winter seas of the upper bay and the Narrows in the dark, with the wind cold and bleak.

The tug had scarcely cast off from the battery, where we met it, when a man, who had been watching us from a crevice of his turned-up collar, quietly edged over.

"You are Prof. Kennedy, the detective?" he began, more as if asserting it than asking the question.

Craig eyed him a moment, but said nothing.

"I understand," he went on, not waiting for a reply, that you are interested in the case of that little Russian dancer, Rawaraska?"

Still Kennedy said nothing.

My name in the case of the customs service," pursued the man, nothing abashed. "Sticking his head forward between the corners of his high collar, he added in a lowered voice: 'You have heard, I suppose, of the famous Cullinan, over 300 carats? It was found in the diggings of the Vaal river a few miles from Kimberley. The dry diggings independent of the De Beers combine, of course. Well, its owner has always been in the position of Mark Twain's man with the million-dollar bank note, who found it too large to cash. No one knows just what an amber diamond of that size is really worth. The De Beers combine, perhaps, the huge top of a deca-ter stopper. It's a beautiful color, and has been estimated at well, as high as close to a quarter of a million, though, as I said, that is all guesswork."

"Yes," remarked Kennedy, more for politeness than anything else. "Wade leaned over closer, shielding his lips from the keen, biting gaze, 'was last known to belong to the De Beers combine, one of my special agents abroad has cabled me to look out for it. He thinks there is reason to believe it will be smuggled into America for safe keeping during the troubles in Belgium."

It seemed to make no difference to the customs man that Kennedy did not exactly welcome him with open arms. "The De Beers combine, one of the leading houses in the 'City of Diamonds,' as Antwerp has been called, is one of the De Beers combine, the Sylvania, the junior partner," he paused, then added, "the husband, perhaps you might be willing to try to help me."

"I should be glad to," replied Kennedy, tersely, pondering what the officer had told us.

Nothing more was said on the trip, and at last we reached the Sylvania, a little cluster of buildings, with myriads of twinkling lights on her face above, but scarcely relieving the blackness of the leviathan form.

Thompson, the purser, a quiet, unexcitable Englishman, met us as we came over the side and for the moment we lost sight of our new-found friend, Wade.

"Perhaps you didn't know it," informed Thompson as we went down the gangway, "but Rawaraska was married—had been for some time."

"Who was her husband?" queried Kennedy, seeking confirmation of what he had already heard.

"Armand De Guerre, a Belgian, of Antwerp," was the reply, "one of the partners in a famous old diamond-cutting firm of that city."

Kennedy looked at the purser keenly for a moment, then asked: "Were they traveling together?"

"Oh, yes, that is, he had engaged a room, but you know how crowded the boats are with refugees, feeling to America from the war. He gave up his room, rather, his share of it to a woman, a professional saleswoman, well known, I believe, in Antwerp as 'Miss Hoffman.' She shared the room with Rawaraska, while De Guerre took his chances in the steerage."

"As we walked down one of the main corridors we noticed ahead of us a seemingly very nervous and excited gentleman engaged apparently in a heated conversation with another."

"Monsieur De Guerre," whispered Thompson as we approached.

The two seemed to be just on the point of parting as we neared them, and I think our approach hastened them, but I could not hear what one of them said, but I heard De Guerre almost hiss as he turned on his heel. "Well, sir, you were the last one seen with her alive."

A moment later the purser introduced us to De Guerre. There was something about him which I can hardly express on paper—a sort of hypnotic fascination. I felt instinctively that such a man would wield a powerful influence over some woman. Was it his eyes or was it merely his ardent foreign grace?

"You must find out the truth," he cried eagerly. "Already they are saying it was suicide. But I cannot believe it. It cannot be. No; she was murdered!"

Kennedy ventured no opinion, but now, more than ever, hastened to signify to the purser that he wanted to look over the ground as quickly as possible before the ship docked.

Rawaraska, we found, had occupied room 188, on the port side, of one of the lower decks. Kennedy

seemed to be keenly interested as we approached the room in which the body still lay waiting arrival at the pier a few hours later.

The stateroom apparently ran to the very skin of the vessel and the ports opened directly on the water, not upon an outside deck as with the rooms above it. It was an outside room at the end of a sort of cross alleyway and it was impossible that any one could have reached it except through the corridors.

Attached to it was a little bath, and directly across from the bath, on the other side, was another small room, which was occupied by her maid, Cecile, a French girl.

In the main bedroom was a double bed, a couch, a wardrobe and a small, thin-legged writing or dressing table.

On the white bed lay the now cold and marble figure of the once vivacious little dancer who had enchanted thousands in life—petite, brunette, voluptuous, Rawaraska was beautiful even in death.

Her finely chiseled features, lacking that heaviness which often characterizes European women, were, however, terribly drawn, and her perfect complexion, on which she had dotted her cheeks, was now all mottled and bluish.

As Kennedy examined the body it could not help observing that there seemed to be every evidence that the girl had been asphyxiated in some strange manner.

Had it been by a deft touch on a nerve of her beautiful, soft neck that had constricted the throat and cut off her breath? I had heard of such things. Or had it been asphyxiation due to a poison that had paralyzed the chest muscles?

The purser as soon as we came aboard had summoned the ship's surgeon, and we had scarcely arrived at Rawaraska's room when he joined us. He was one of those solid, reliable doctors, not brilliant, but one whom you might place great confidence in. Dr. Sanderson of Edinburgh, and long a follower of the sea.

"Was there any evidence of a struggle?" asked Kennedy.

"No; none whatever," replied the doctor.

"No peculiar odor, no receptacle of any kind near her that might have held poison?"

"No, nothing that could have been used to hold poison or a drug," Kennedy was regarding the face of the little dancer attentively. "Most extraordinary," he remarked slowly.

"That congested look she has," "Yes," agreed Dr. Sanderson, "her face was flushed and blue when I got to her—cyanotic, I should say. There seemed to be a great dryness of her throat and the muscles of her throat were paralytic. Her pupils were dilated, too, and her pulse was rapid, as if from a greatly increased blood pressure."

"Was she conscious?" asked Kennedy, almost reverently turning over her rigid body and looking at the back of her neck and the upper spine.

"Did she recognize anything, say anything?"

"She seemed to be in a state of amnesia," replied Sanderson slowly. "Evidently if she had seen anything she had forgotten or wouldn't tell," he added cautiously.

"Who found her?" asked Craig.

"How was she discovered?"

"Yes, a young American found her," replied the purser quickly. "She called one of the stewards. She had been sitting in the library reading until quite late and Rawaraska had retired early, for she was not a good sailor, they tell me. It must have been nearly midnight when De Guerre and a friend, passing at the library door on their way from the smoking room, saw Miss Hoffman, and all three stopped in the Ritz restaurant for a bite to eat."

De Guerre walked down the corridor with Miss Hoffman afterward," he continued, "and left her as she went into the room with his wife. Perhaps a minute later—long enough, anyway, so that he had reached the other end of the corridor—she screamed. She had turned on the light and found Rawaraska lying half across the bed unconscious. Miss Hoffman called to the steward to summon Dr. Preston, but he came to me first instead."

"Dr. Preston?" repeated Kennedy.

"Yes, a young American physician, the friend who had been with De Guerre in the smoking room part of the evening and later made up the party in the restaurant," vouchsafed Sanderson.

"The man De Guerre was talking to us as we came down the hall," put in Thompson.

"Hm," mused Kennedy, evidently weighing of the remark we had overheard.

"I've talked with him now and then myself," admitted Sanderson. "No, nothing that could have been used to hold poison or a drug."

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into the steerage of the Sylvania, though, of course, like De Guerre, he was classed as a first cabin passenger. He had become very friendly with Rawaraska and her party while they were waiting for bookings in London."

Thompson leaned over. "The steward in the corridor tells me, he said in a low tone, 'that early in the evening Dr. Preston and Rawaraska were on the promenade deck together.'"

I tried vaguely to piece together the scraps of information which we had gleaned. Kennedy, however, said nothing, but was now leaning over the body of the little dancer, looking at the upper region of her spine attentively. "Quietly from a group of three or four little red marks on her back he squeezed out several drops of liquid, absorbing them in a piece of sterile gauze."

A moment later De Guerre, who had quietly slipped away during the examination, as if unable to bear the sight of the tragedy, returned, and with him was a young woman.

"Miss Elsa Hoffman," he introduced.

Miss Hoffman was of a fascinating type—tall, finely groomed, of superb voice, physically perfect. One could not help admiring her deep blue eyes and blonde radiance. Indeed, I felt that one must rely much on her attraction in pursuit of her business of selling gems to wealthy men and women. Still, in spite of her evident poise, the tragedy seemed to have oppressed and unnerved her.

She did not seem to be able to add much to the scanty stock of facts we had, even after repeating the story of her discovery of Rawaraska, which was substantially all that the purser had already told it.

"I—I think, perhaps, Mr. Kennedy ought to question Cecile," she suggested finally, turning toward De Guerre, who nodded his assent.

A sudden movement in the passageway followed and the door opened quietly. A man entered, a youngish fellow of fine physique and attractive face. I recognized him immediately as Dr. Preston. His apparently usually debonair manner was visibly subdued by the presence of death.

Evidently he had just heard that some one was investigating the tragedy and had hastened to be present. Both De Guerre and Elsa nodded to him, a trifle coldly. Only a moment did he pause to look at the dead face on the pillow, then stood

apart, ill at ease, until Kennedy had finished his minute examination. As Kennedy moved away from the bed Dr. Preston contrived to place himself near him and apart from the rest.

"Mr. Kennedy," he began in a husky undertone, "they tell me you have been engaged to investigate this—this awful affair."

Kennedy assented.

"If there is anything I can do to help you," Preston added anxiously, "I hope you will command me. In fact," he added, as Kennedy nodded while Preston glanced covertly at De Guerre and Miss Hoffman, "I hope you'll get at the truth."

"Thank you," responded Kennedy, meeting his eye squarely this time. "I shall be glad to call on you if occasion arises."

(To be continued in tomorrow's Star.)

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